

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

U. S. AIR FORCE ENLISTED ACCESSIONS:
UPGRADING THE PIPELINE

by

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Biography

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Introduction

A widely accepted truism in the business world is organizations must adapt to changes in their operating environment or risk failure.¹ Large government organizations like the Department of Defense (DoD) are no exception. DoD is currently undergoing a “training transformation,” described in the February 2009 *Strategic Plan for Transforming DoD Training*, to more flexibly respond to a rapidly changing environment.² The U. S. Air Force’s Air Education and Training Command (AETC) also fully subscribes to the necessity of organizational change. A 2008 AETC white paper states, “If the Air Force of the 21st century is to be an agile, adaptive, learning organization, it must embrace change, accept risk, cope with reverses, and learn to reinvent itself—constantly.”³

Several AETC initiatives are under way to understand and harness new education concepts such as knowledge management, continuous learning, and precision learning with experiments like “MyBase,” an interactive virtual environment.⁴ This willingness of AETC leadership to actively encourage organizational change bodes well for the future and should be applied at the very foundation of the Air Force—where citizens first come in contact with the Service in recruiting and initial training.

¹ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 3. Kotter writes, “By any objective measure, the amount of significant, often traumatic, change in organizations has grown tremendously over the past two decades...More and more organizations will be pushed to reduce costs, improve the quality of products and services, locate new opportunities for growth, and increase productivity.”

² Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, *2008-2009 Strategic Plan for Transforming DoD Training*, February 2009, 3. The report states, “Effective training requires carefully managing the balance between sustaining and enhancing the current force’s ability to respond to today’s environment while investing in capabilities to more effectively train the future force to meet the complex, unpredictable challenges of tomorrow.”

³ Air Education and Training Command Headquarters A5/8/9, *On Learning: The Future of Air Force Education and Training*, (U.S. Air Force White Paper AFD-080130-066, 2008), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4, 10.

The Air Force's enlisted accessions process has historically been very effective, but improvements are needed to sustain this effectiveness in the future.⁵ Several signs point to potentially greater difficulties in meeting enlisted manpower needs in years to come. Factors such as declining trends in the inclination for military service among American youth, ongoing worldwide combat operations, and a rebounding economy will likely strain accession efforts in future years. The Air Force should be proactive in taking bold measures to examine and improve existing recruiting and training practices in order to readily confront this developing challenge. This paper will lay out the case for why change is needed, explore some existing problems in the current accessions process, and suggest improvements for AETC leadership to employ or further investigate to make the enlisted accessions process more effective in the future.⁶

Is the Pipeline Sufficient? Why Changes are Needed

Even when overall recruiting goals are met there are often still shortfalls in specific manpower areas. A 2005 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report showed a shortage of over 700 Air Force recruits in 2005 for "hard-to-recruit" career fields.⁷ Thus, even in years considered successful, significant recruiting challenges remain.

Success in meeting recruiting goals depends on many factors, not all of which are under the Services' control. External factors include the state of the economy, the size and

⁵ Air Force Recruiting Service has attained its recruiting goals in 29 of the last 30 years (1999 being the exception at 95%). See Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, *Total Enlisted Accessions to Active Duty Versus Service Goals*, available at <http://prhome.defense.gov/mpprecruiting.html>

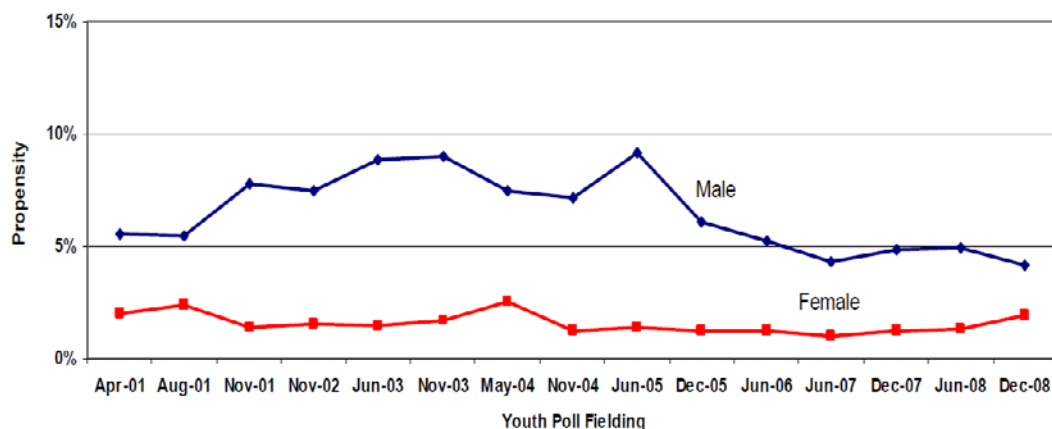
⁶ This paper will address only USAF enlisted accessions. While similar problems may or may not exist in the officer accession processes, this essay does not attempt to address officer accessions.

⁷ GAO Report: *Preliminary Observations on Recruiting and Retention Issues within the U.S. Armed Forces*; Statement of Derek B. Stewart, Director, Defense Capabilities and Management. March 16, 2005. 14. www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-419T.

characteristics of the youth population, and predisposition of youth toward joining the military.⁸ Several of these factors are trending negatively and could combine to form a “perfect storm” in the military recruiting environment in years to come.

Youth Propensity and Influencers

Propensity is defined in recruiting polls as the proportion of respondents who say they will “definitely” or “probably” enter military service.⁹ Figure 1 shows trends over the past 8 years in this predilection of American young people toward interest in the military.



Source: 2001–2008 Youth Polls

Figure 1. Unaided Military Propensity Trends.¹⁰

While female propensity since 2001 remained relatively stable from 1% - 3%, male propensity fluctuated considerably and as of December 2008—the last reporting period available—was at approximately 4%. This was the lowest point since before the attacks of September 11, 2001.

⁸ Barbara A. Bicksler and Lisa G. Nolan, *Recruiting An All Volunteer Force: The Need for Sustained Investment in Recruiting Resources*, (Arlington, VA: Strategic Analysis, Inc., September 2006), 3.

⁹ Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS), *December 2008 Youth Poll 16 Report*, vii. <http://www.jamrs.org/mrs.php>.

¹⁰ Ibid., 3-13. “Unaided” means polling questions did not suggest military service, so respondents had to suggest it of their own accord as opposed to alternatives such as entering college or civilian careers. “Aided” means military service was listed as one of several alternatives on poll questions. While “aided” propensity trends were slightly up in most ethnic groups from Dec 07 to Dec 08, the “unaided” propensity to serve is down overall, meaning most youth do not consider military service unless prompted by questioners to consider it.

One factor explaining this downward trend is the opinion of role models to whom young people turn for advice. Influencers, as defined by the Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS), are “adults ages 22–85 who directly influence youth ages 12–24...Influencers range from coaches and clergy to mothers and guidance counselors.”¹¹ They directly affect the norms and attitudes of youth and their interactions play an important role in youth aspirations and career decision making.¹² Influencers are increasingly reluctant to recommend military service to youth, and both parent and non-parent influencers “feel that general support for military service is waning.”¹³ When asked what post high-school options they would recommend, influencers overwhelmingly recommend further education.¹⁴ As Figure 2 shows, parental influence of their children toward the military dropped by half in only 5 years.

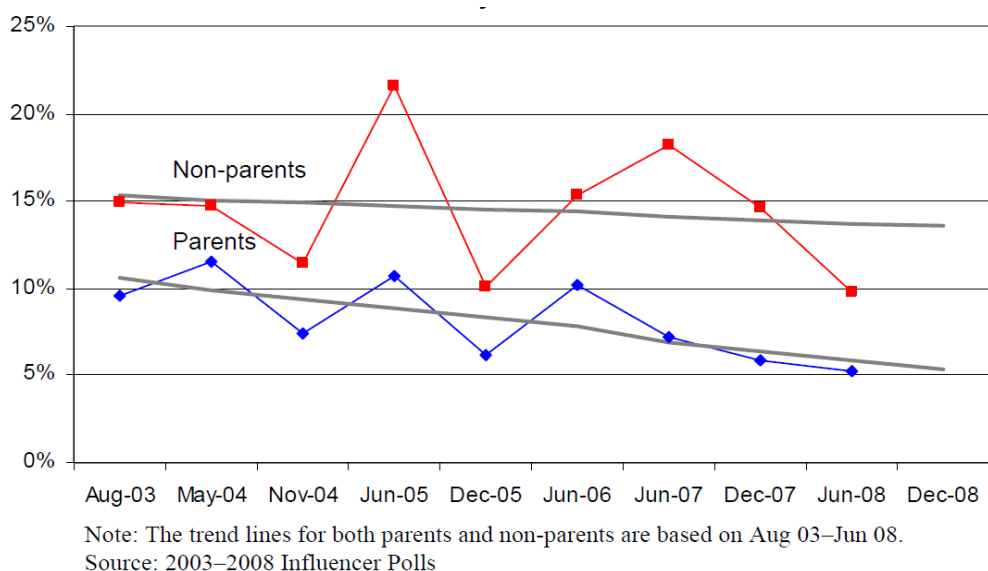


Figure 2. Trends in Unaided Likelihood of Influencers to Recommend Military Service¹⁵

¹¹ Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS), *June 2008 Influencer Poll 10*, 2.
<http://www.jamrs.org/mrs.php>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

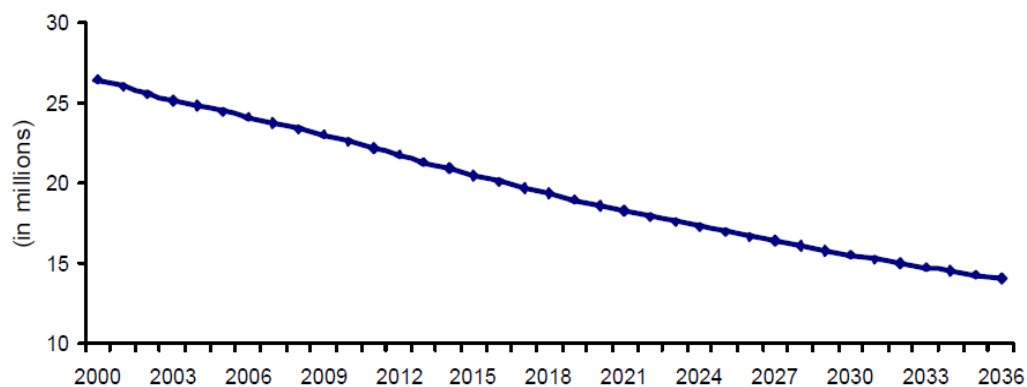
¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10. While 91% of parents and 87% of non-parents responded they would recommend further education, only 5% of parents and 10% of non-parents would recommend military service.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11. See note 10 for explanation of “unaided”.

Other Factors

There are several reasons for these negative trends in youth propensity and influencer recommendations. First, ongoing worldwide combat operations since the attacks of September 11, 2001 are having a detrimental effect. Many influencers fear youth will face personal hardship, danger, and an unattractive lifestyle if they enlist. These fears likely stem in part from media coverage of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁶

A second negative factor is the steady reduction in the influence of veterans on today's youth. Studies have shown a link between knowing a veteran and enlistment proclivity.¹⁷ At the end of the Cold War in 1992, over 40% of youth ages 16–21 had fathers with military experience. By December 2008 that number had dropped to only 20%.¹⁸ As the veteran population continues to decline, so will its influence on youths propensity to serve, thus contributing to future recruiting challenges.



Source: U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs: VetPop 2007

Figure 3. Projected U.S. Veteran Population¹⁹

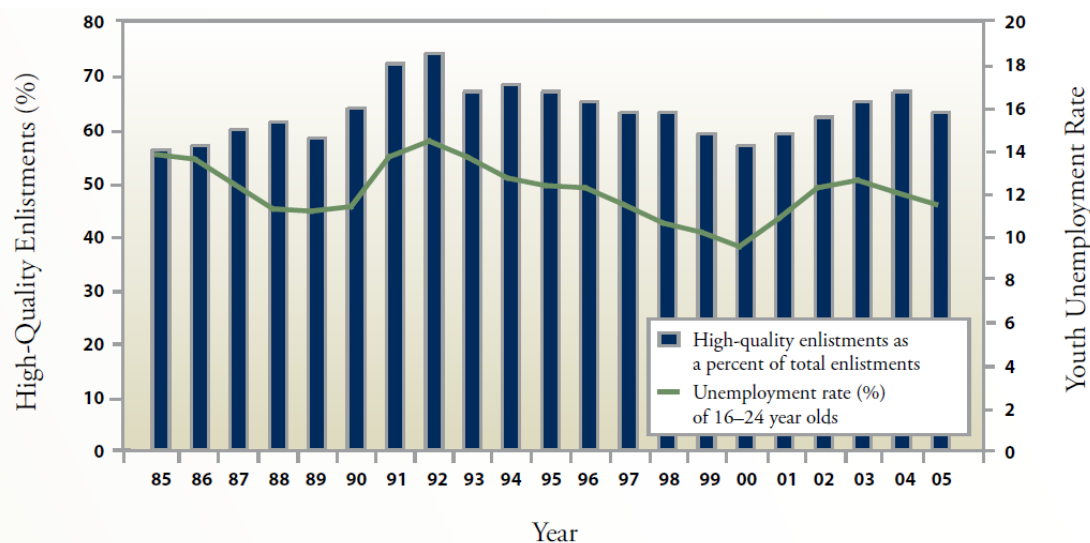
¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹⁷ Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies (JAMRS), *December 2008 Youth Poll 16 Report*, 2-7.
<http://www.jamrs.org/mrs.php>

¹⁸ Ibid., 2-8

¹⁹ Ibid., 2-7.

A third factor is employment opportunity for young people. It has long been known that with an all-volunteer force the availability of civilian job opportunities directly affects the relative attractiveness of military service.²⁰ Figure 4 shows the proportion of high-quality military recruits over the last 20 years has been closely tied to fluctuations in youth unemployment. Unemployment forecasts generally predict improvement in coming months, from 10.2% in November 2009 to approximately 8.6% -9.6% in December 2010.²¹ ²² A dropping unemployment rate will make civilian job opportunities more numerous and will reduce the number of high quality youth receptive to recruiters.



Source: U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 4. High Quality Enlistments and Youth Unemployment.²³

²⁰ Bicksler and Nolan, *Recruiting An All Volunteer Force*, 3.

²¹ National Association for Business Economics, *Unemployment Rate Forecast, By Quarters, April 2009*. Available at <http://www.nabe.com/graphweek/2009/gw090322.html>

²² Results of Wall Street Journal monthly consensus of 52 U.S economist surveyed, November 2009. Available at <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/info-flash08.html?project=EFORECAST07>

²³ Ibid., 3.

Another negative recruiting factor is increased availability of post-secondary education. College enrollment is expected to continue setting new records with a forecasted increase of 10 percent between 2007 and 2017.²⁴ An increase in high school graduates entering college results in a further shrinking pool from which military recruiters normally draw applicants.

While these external factors are trending negatively, there are few—if any—positive factors to balance them. There is little reason to believe the military recruiting environment will not become significantly more challenging for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the Services must examine whether current practices are capable of meeting this challenge.

Where are the Problems? Leaks, Joints, and Measuring Pipeline Flow

The enlisted accessions process is often referred to as an “accessions pipeline” as depicted in Figure 5. The pipeline consists of entering the Delayed Enlistment Program (DEP), attending Basic Military Training (BMT), and attending a technical training school to learn a specific career skill.²⁵ Upon completion of tech training and arrival at an operational unit, an Airman then completes On-the-Job Training (OJT) before being considered fully mission-ready in their career field. Since potential Airmen are not enlistment eligible until 17 years of age, and future success in OJT is the responsibility of the gaining command, those limits are generally accepted as the beginning and end of the pipeline.

²⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: College Enrollment*, 2008. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d08>

²⁵ AETC A3T briefing, *Training a New Breed of Airmen*, gives a full explanation of post-BMT training processes. Depending on assigned career field, BMT graduates may go to a technical training school under 2nd Air Force, to flying training under 19th Air Force, or medical training under AFSAMS. Throughout this document “tech training” is used generically to refer to the next step in enlisted training beyond BMT regardless of career field.

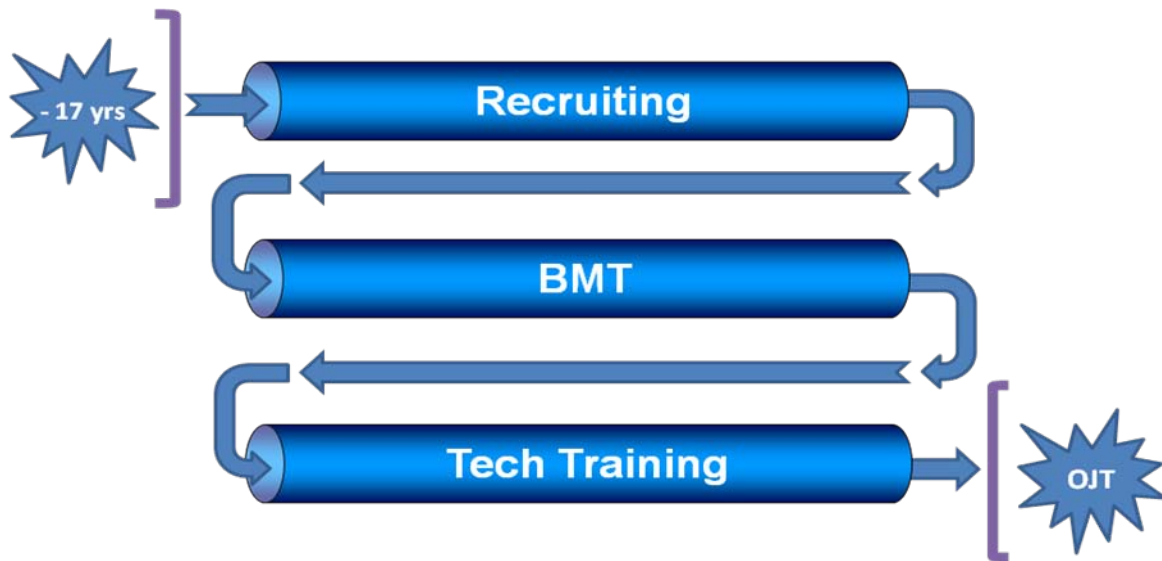


Figure 5. Traditional USAF Accessions Perspective.

Is this view accurate, and if so, is it optimum? Several important questions should be considered. Does the accession pipeline begin when a qualified applicant first comes in personal contact with a recruiter, or is it earlier—when a child first views an Air Force television ad or attends an air show and begins dreaming of some day joining the Air Force? Where does the pipeline actually end? Should AETC “declare victory” from an accessions perspective at BMT graduation since that is the first time a member is called “Airman” (rather than “Applicant”, “DEPer”, or “Trainee”)? If the milestone is celebrated with a formal ceremony and presentation of the Airman’s Coin, why would it not logically be considered the end of the accession pipeline? Or is a longer view more logical? Since Airmen can and do “wash out” of OJT and get discharged before becoming fully trained and contributing Air Force members, one could argue accession is not complete until an Airman is certified as mission-ready in their first operational unit. The viewpoint of where the pipeline begins and ends has significant implications for how the Air Force organizes, operates, and measures success in accessions.

Leaks: Pre-Applicants, DEP, and Training Disqualifications

In addition to the difficulty of defining its beginning and end, the pipeline also has many “leaks” resulting in waste and inefficiency. Figure 6 shows examples of how and where these leaks occur—leaks which are considered normal attrition. When an application stops during the recruiting process, the potential Airman (on whom the recruiter has already invested time and resources) becomes an attrition statistic. Even after an applicant successfully qualifies and enlists in the DEP, many factors can cause discharge before entering BMT. More attrition occurs during BMT and tech training for various reasons, only a few examples of which are shown. Leaders at Air Force Recruiting Service (AFRS), BMT, and tech training understand this wasted effort and work to keep attrition low while keeping the quality of recruits and Airmen as high as possible. However, one area potentially being overlooked is how attrition might be reduced among “pre-applicants.”

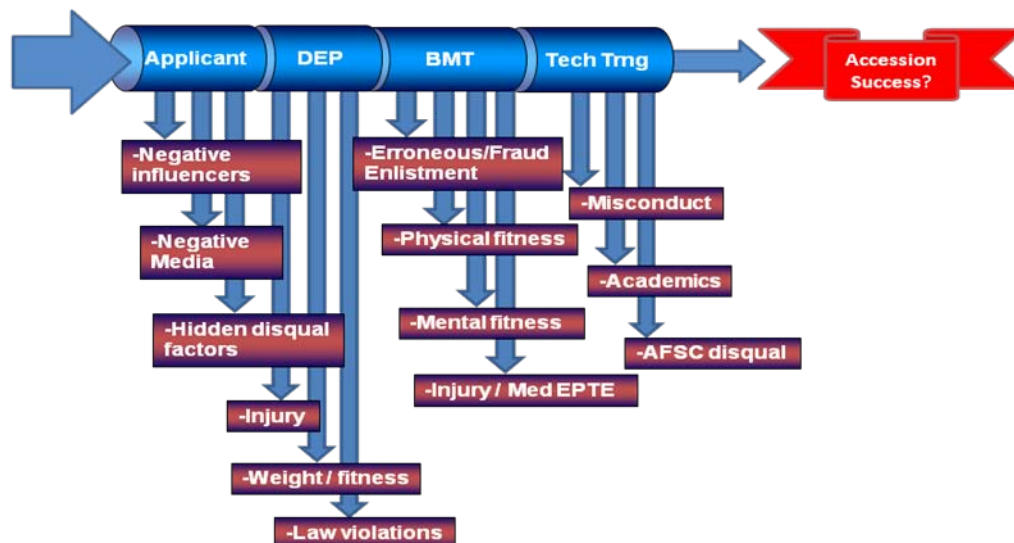


Figure 6: Accession Attrition Factors

An oft-quoted statistic in the recruiting business is that only 27% of American youth are qualified for military service.²⁶ What factors disqualify so many potential Airmen before they reach enlistment age, thus keeping them from fulfilling their lifelong dream? Figure 7 depicts a few of the myriad examples of such pre-applicant attrition. Many young people are not qualified because of law violations, being overweight, an inability to pass the required Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), or for a host of other reasons. Pre-applicant attrition is a significant hurdle to fulfilling the Services' manpower needs and it drastically shrinks the pool of potential recruits.

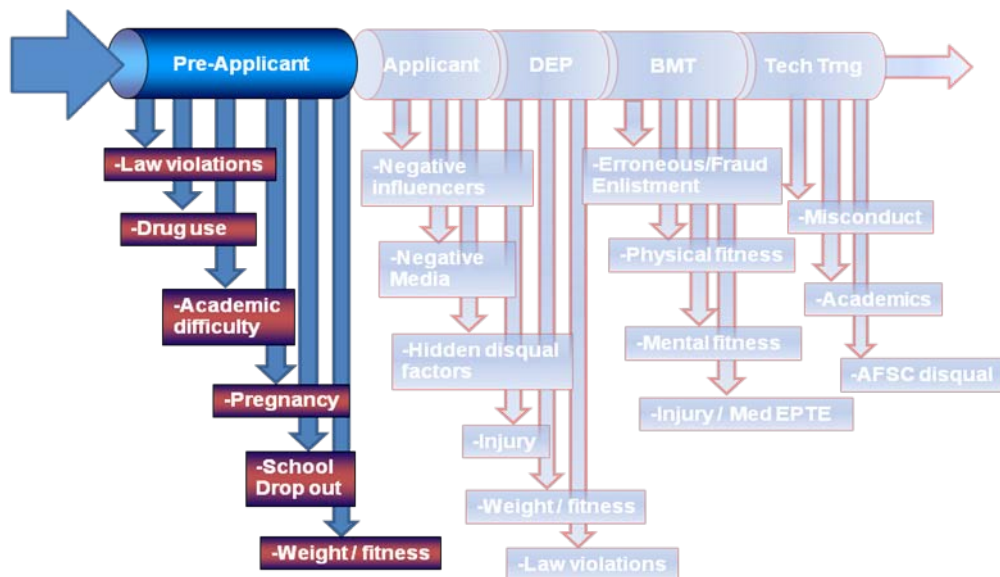


Figure 7: Pre-Applicant Attrition Factors

Misaligned Joints: Feedback, Coordination, and Big Picture Metrics

Though the accessions pipeline is normally thought of as a single entity, Figure 5 is actually more accurate by showing three essentially distinct pipes not joined together. Lack of

²⁶ Headquarters Air Education and Training Command A8PZ, *2009 AETC Strategic Plan*, April 2009. 16.

coordination between the three communities—what one might consider misalignment in the joints of the pipeline—causes significant problems and exacerbates attrition.

This is especially true between the recruiting and basic training communities. AFRS has liaisons at BMT and formal relationships are professional and cordial. At the individual recruiter and Military Training Instructor (MTI) level, however, there is often an underlying tension regarding causes for attrition due to lack of understanding and appreciation of the difficulties involved in both recruiting and MTI duty. Some recruiters believe MTIs often cause high quality recruits to wash out of BMT due to excessive harshness and training malpractice. Conversely, some MTIs believe recruiters often fulfill their goals by ignoring or hiding disqualifying information that indicates a recruit has little chance of coping with the physical and mental demands of BMT and Air Force duty.

It is not uncommon for trainees who fail at BMT to claim their recruiter misled them or helped them hide pre-existing disqualification factors. AFRS liaisons investigate all such allegations, but the results of such inquiries are often inconclusive and get little visibility at squadron or group leadership level in AFRS. Statistics on these allegations are not thoroughly tracked to identify trends and systematically provide corrective recruiter training. Better coordination and partnering in thoroughly analyzing training attrition cases and trends could help screen applicants with very low probability of success. It could also help recruiters better prepare recruits for the rigors of BMT and tech training and could significantly reduce attrition throughout the pipeline, avoiding wasted effort and cost.²⁷

Another problem with the pipeline is lack of common, comprehensive measuring tools—each pipeline segment measures its own success in different ways. AFRS tracks dozens of

²⁷ Recent coordination improvements have been made, such as initial physical fitness screening, new procedures for reclassifying recruits into different jobs upon disqualification for a particular career field, and progressing graduating BMT Airmen with medical problems on to tech training when practical.

metrics such as recruiter phone calls, school visits, and productivity of geographic zones. BMT tracks weekly attrition trends down to the individual MTI level so potential problems can be identified and corrected. Second Air Force (2AF) established a Technical Training Operations Center (TTOC) in 2007 with an analysis section entirely devoted to tracking, analyzing, and reporting factors affecting tech training courses across the Air Force. Yet, despite all these metrics and reporting done through AETC's Balanced Score Card and other leadership feedback mechanisms, do senior leaders truly know whether overall enlisted accessions effectiveness is improving or what areas are most promising for further advancement?

If effective screening methods were developed for recruiting, would they positively affect training attrition? How does AETC quantify individual MTI and Military Training Leader (MTL) performance and measure improvement? If trainers and recruiters are provided better professional development programs, can the corresponding impact on pipeline attrition be measured and accurately attributed? Can predictive tools be developed to identify future accession trends? Such questions are not readily answered with current stove-piped metrics, thus leaving senior decision makers to make educated guesses regarding where to focus attention and allocate resources for maximum impact.

Improve, Exploit, or Abandon? The Theory of the Business

Peter F. Drucker, widely regarded as one of the foremost experts on business practices in the 20th century, wrote of large, formerly successful corporations that encountered severe crises:

The root cause of nearly every one of these crises is not that things are being done poorly. It is not even that the wrong things are being done. Indeed, in most cases the *right* things are being done—but fruitlessly. What accounts for this apparent paradox? The assumptions on which the organization has been built and is being run no longer fit reality. These are the assumptions that shape any organization's behavior, dictate its

decisions about what to do and what not to do, and define what the organization considers meaningful results...They are what I call a company's *theory of the business*.²⁸

Drucker goes on to say every organization, whether a business or not, has a theory of business. Further, he asserts every theory of business eventually becomes obsolete and then invalid, and failure to recognize this obsolescence is what leads to a crisis. His remedy is perhaps the most important point:

What then, needs to be done? There is a need for preventative care—that is, for building into the organization systematic monitoring and testing of its theory of business. There is a need for early diagnosis. Finally, there is a need to rethink a theory that is stagnating and to take effective action in order to change policies and practices, bringing the organization's behavior in line with the new realities of its environment...²⁹

The concept of the theory of business is so important it bears concisely repeating here:

The assumptions on which an organization has been built and that shape its behavior, dictate its decisions, and define its meaningful results. As previously discussed, the recruiting environment is becoming more challenging, training is transforming, accession processes are not optimized, and overall results are not comprehensively measured. It is time to closely examine underlying assumptions to determine if the theory of business in Air Force enlisted accessions should change.

In other Drucker writings we find a convenient framework for examining and addressing needed changes. In essence, he advocates putting all paradigms, processes, and organizational constructs “on trial” to determine if they are proper for the current environment. Wherever it is needed, change should be accomplished through organized *improvement*, through *exploitation* of success, or through organized *abandonment*.³⁰ Using this framework, let us examine some potential areas for change.

²⁸ Peter F. Drucker, *Managing in a Time of Great Change*, (New York: Truman Talley Books/Dutton, 1995), 22.

²⁹ Ibid, 32.

³⁰ Peter F. Drucker, *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 74-83.

Improve: Marketing and Branding for Digital Natives³¹

Because of their “I must make my monthly goal” mentality, recruiters are typically reluctant to spend time or effort engaging teenagers prior to their junior year of high school. The younger set cannot help fulfill immediate recruiting needs. But are there steps the Service could take to prevent pre-applicant attrition at early ages and thus provide—at a later time—a larger pool of qualified and receptive candidates for recruiters to tap?

JAMRS research shows because adults and youth alike are generally uninformed about the reality of military service, associations become very important.³² People rely on their associations to fill gaps in their knowledge. Therefore, to build long-term trust and a positive image of the military lifestyle, it is important to nurture personal associations with the civilian public.³³ This means *long-term, recurring, personal contact* with military role models can build a sustained positive image with youth and their adult influencers and can be a strategic, sustainable advantage in recruiting.

One method for developing these long-term associations could be through formal “influence and intervention” programs. For positive influence, the Air Force could create citizenship programs for children with an aviation and space emphasis, perhaps with sponsorship and assistance from Civil Air Patrol (CAP) or Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC)

³¹ Marc Prensky, *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants*. From “On the Horizon”, (MCB University Press, Vol. 9 No. 5, October 2001), 1. Prensky describes “Digital Natives” as people who have never known a world without internet, computer games, email, and cell phones. These individuals function best when networked and thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards.

³² Joint Advertising, Research, Marketing, and Studies (JAMRS), *September 2003 Adult Poll 5*, v. <http://www.jamrs.org/mrs.php>.

³³ *Ibid.*, 45. The survey states, “Brand equity can be defined in terms of an associative network model ...where the brand has a variety of simple unique associations linked to it. Research has repeatedly shown that these associations serve as both a key strategic asset and a source of sustainable competitive advantage. As such, it is important for corporations and institutions alike to understand the associations that members of their target markets have regarding their brand. A key piece of this effort includes tracking these associations over time and working to develop an understanding of how various actions, advertisements, sponsorship programs, and world events impact them.”

chapters. Alternatively, it might be possible to simply leverage existing programs and lend more direct Air Force visibility. CAP already operates several well established nationwide aerospace education, mentorship, and citizenship programs for children as young as kindergarten age.³⁴ CAP and JROTC have also recently linked with the Air Force Association to create a program called CyberPatriot, a one-of-a-kind nationwide high school cyber defense competition.³⁵ Such programs are ready-made influence venues where the Air Force could build personal associations with young people by formally sponsoring activities and encouraging uniformed Airmen to systematically mentor youngsters.

Along with influence initiatives, the Air Force could also develop intervention programs like tutoring children and teenagers who are struggling academically, using Airmen on duty and in uniform (perhaps as a part of their Professional Military Education). Additionally, formal Big Brother/Big Sister-type programs could be developed where youth are sponsored onto a base regularly and allowed to observe and join Air Force members at work and at play. Obviously, such programs might require significant funding, have legal or policy hurdles to overcome, and face resistance from some segments of both civilian and military communities. But intervention programs could have the two-fold potential to positively impact at-risk American youths by consistent exposure to positive role models and simultaneously enlarge the future population of available recruits by preserving their qualifications.

³⁴ Civil Air Patrol, *Annual Report to Congress, 2008*, 27. http://members.gocivilairpatrol.com/cap_national_hq. The report describes one such program as, "...an exciting prototype program for children in kindergarten through sixth grade, emphasizes aerospace education, character development and physical fitness...7,000 students at 29 sites across the nation are participating in this dynamic aerospace enrichment program."

³⁵ Air Force Association press release: *AFA, Microsoft Announce Software for CyberPatriot II*. December 15, 2009. http://www.afa.org/media/press/MS_CyberPatriot.asp. Microsoft announced it will support the competition and AFA announced it will open the competition to all students rather than only CAP and JROTC members as before. Both of these moves should give the already successful program even wider visibility and participation.

In contrast to the Air Force, the Army is already aggressively engaging the education community and attempting to influence youth at pre-accession ages. Army leaders signed formal memorandums of understanding in 2009 to pursue joint ventures with both the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE). Specific collaboration efforts include improving graduation rates, elevating health and fitness levels of young people, and expanding test preparation and career assessment resources.³⁶ NASBE Executive Director Brenda Welburn said of the venture, “Through this remarkable partnership, we are committing to a significant and sustained dialogue—and joint actions—to align the resources of the U.S. Army with the education system to improve outcomes for youth in communities across the country.”³⁷ The Air Force would do well to follow the Army’s lead in this arena and investigate similar partnership opportunities.

Exploit: Metrics, Incentives, and Control of the Pipeline

Each community in the accessions process has highly developed strengths based on many years of experience. Exploiting those strengths and creating synergy by sharing best practices across the entire accessions enterprise is one of the best ways to positively change the theory of business in accessions.³⁸ For example, the elaborate AFRS competition system results in great

³⁶ *Memorandum of Understanding Between the U.S. Army Accessions Command and the Association for Career and Technical Education*. November 20, 2009. <http://dev.armyedspace.com/news-updates/news/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-us-army-and-acte/>

³⁷ Army Ed Space News, *ACTE and U.S. Army Sign Education Memorandum of Understanding*, March 12, 2009. <http://dev.armyedspace.com/news-updates/news/>

³⁸ Recent efforts in this area have shown promise. For example, AFRS took several major reorganizing steps in 2007-2008 to combine squadrons and groups and change roles and responsibilities for officer accessions. In 2008, BMT initiated a professional development program to train MTIs to provide better leadership, mentorship, and motivation to trainees in an effort to reduce attrition. Many changes were also made at BMT to decrease the number of lower extremity injuries, ensure successful return to training after injury or illness, and to track and intervene in negative attrition trends. To better monitor and control tech training results, AETC initiated two Tiger Teams, six contractor studies by consultants like RAND, Perot Systems, and IBM, and numerous General Officer summit meetings between 2001 and 2008. (See 2AF/CC Roles and Responsibilities Briefing, 28 July 2009.) However, while many of these efforts have been effective, none have been targeted across the entire accessions enterprise.

productivity and could be modeled in BMT and tech training whereby squadrons and flights compete with one another and are incentivized to keep attrition low and production high.

Teaming concepts could also be explored where recruiting squadrons or regions are associated with respective BMT squadrons to find ways to coordinate efforts in decreasing attrition in both the DEP and BMT.

BMT continues to enhance its strong professional development program which has been well received by MTIs. This program could be exploited by replicating and tailoring it for recruiters and tech training MTLs. In tech training, the TTOC's analysis expertise could be exploited to develop robust predictive tools to aid in screening applicants. If the Air Force could predict which combinations of negative indicators in an applicant's profile would result in a quantifiable probability of failure at a certain time in the accession process, a "potential lost investment cost" could be established based on the known recruiting and training bill. A rational accession decision could then be made based on the cost/risk analysis. Moreover, the point of acceptable risk could be easily modified based on needs of the Air Force at a particular time.³⁹ Highly capable predictive tools could lead to great efficiency and avoid wasting resources on low viability applicants who have little chance of long term success.

Abandon: Sacrosanct Organizational Paradigms

If one accepts that the current theory of business is not sacrosanct, then any current practice—or organizational chart—is also subject to review. A specific concept AETC could examine closely is *keiretsu*, a popular business practice of post-World War II Japan that

³⁹ For example, trend analysis might show a given combination of negative factors (poor fitness, multiple law violations, poor ASVAB scores, etc.) equates to a 55% probability of failure in training by the sixth week of BMT. In a comfortable recruiting climate applicants might not be worth that risk. But if the recruiting climate were very challenging, or if the applicant possessed a highly valued skill for a critically undermanned career field, the risk might be deemed acceptable. Thus, the decision point for risk acceptance could change depending on Service needs.

eventually spread to other industrialized countries. Keiretsu links organizations so they have common interests and work together to attain common goals.⁴⁰ If each section of the accessions pipeline had a stake in the performance of the others—a keiretsu relationship—the mutual benefit of sharing information and working together in overall attrition reduction would be obvious to all.

Examining other U.S. military services, one can see the concept of Keiretsu at work to an extent in the Marine Corps accessions construct which deserves closer study. Two regional Marine Corp Recruit Depot (MCRD) commanders report directly to the Marine Corp Recruiting Command (MCRC) commander, as shown in the upper portion of Figure 8. They are each responsible for three recruiting districts encompassing multiple recruiting stations. However, Marine Corps Combat Development Command has training oversight of the two MCRDs through Training and Education Command as shown in the lower portion of Figure 8. The MCRD commanders each have three training regiments assigned who are responsible for boot camp training.⁴¹ Thus, the MCRD commanders are accountable to Recruiting Command for meeting recruiting goals and to Combat Development Command for fulfillment of boot camp training curriculum. While such matrixed organizations can sometimes be pulled between competing equities of multiple bosses, the upside to this model is both recruiting and basic training missions are closely linked.

⁴⁰ The Economist. *Keiretsu*. October 16, 2009. Available at <http://www.economist.com/businessfinance/management/displaystory.cfm?story>. The author describes keiretsu as a “...corporate structure in which a number of organizations link together, usually by taking small stakes in each other and usually as a result of having a close business relationship, often as suppliers to each other. The structure...is a way to defuse the traditionally adversarial relationship between buyer and supplier. If you own a bit of your supplier, reinforced sometimes by your supplier owning a bit of you, the theory says that you are more likely to reach a way of working that is of mutual benefit to you both than if your relationship is at arm’s length.”

⁴¹ See web page: *Leaders, MCRD Parris Island, ERR*. <http://www.mcrdpi.usmc.mil/leaders/index.asp>

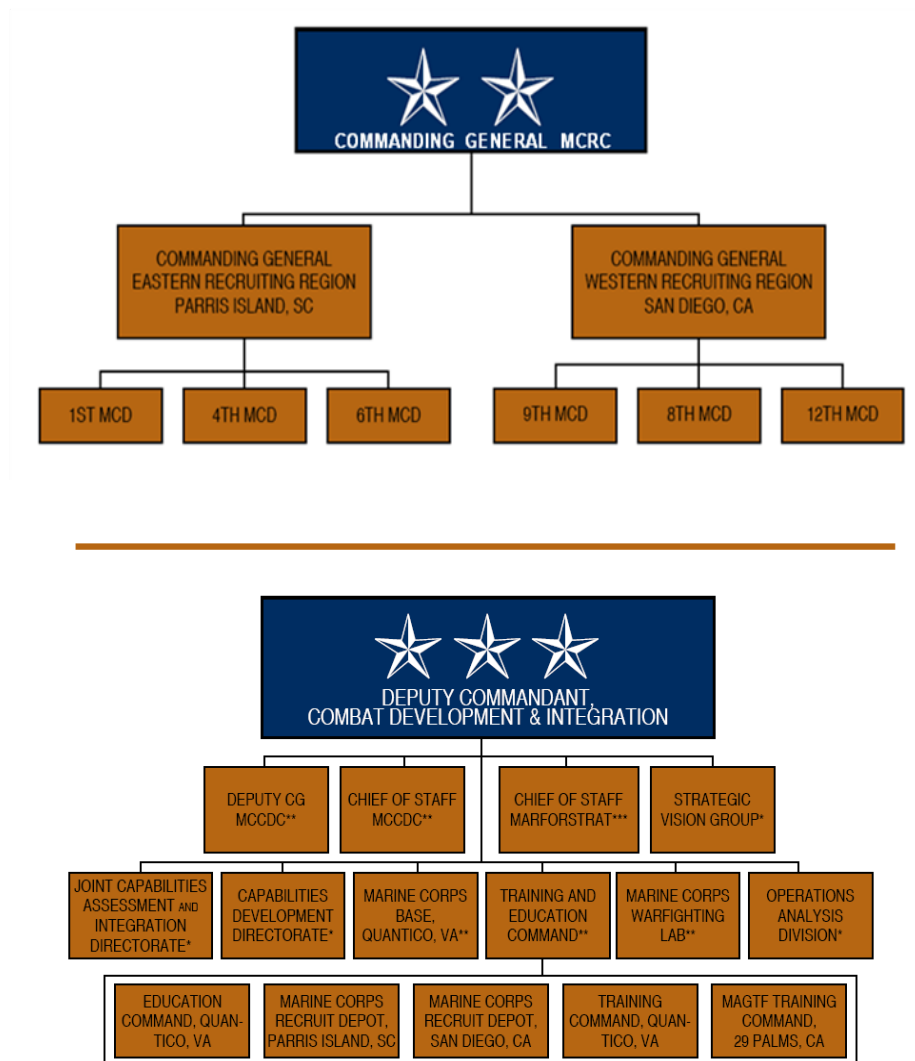


Figure 8: Marine Corps Recruiting and Training Organizations⁴²

A key aspect of the Marine Corps procedure is a recruiter does not get full credit toward a recruiting goal until their recruit successfully completes boot camp. Therefore, recruiters have significant motivation to seek applicants assessed to have a high probability of success in training and they spend time preparing recruits for boot camp success. While they are not directly involved, recruiters have a large stake in how boot camp training is conducted.

⁴² Headquarters Marine Corp Program Assessment and Evaluation Division, *USMC Concepts and Programs*, 2009, 47, 60.

Though no such link between recruiting and training currently exists in Air Force accession, one could develop several alternative Air Force organizational models for consideration. A general depiction of the current Air Force construct is shown in Figure 9, where AFRS owns all marketing and recruiting aspects and 2AF owns BMT and the majority of tech training.⁴³

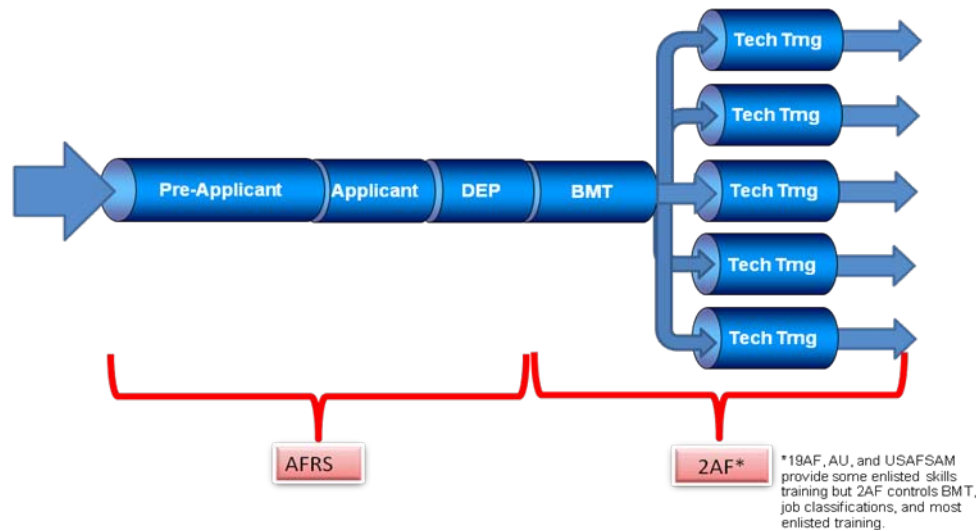


Figure 9: Current US Air Force Enlisted Accessions Organizational Construct.

If one accepts the premise of the accession process logically ending upon graduation from BMT and gaining of the “Airman” title, putting recruiting and BMT efforts together into a (notionally named) “AF Enlisted Accessions Service” separate from the tech training enterprise would be logical as shown in Figure 10. Consolidating all tech training under the purview of a single “Enlisted Career Training Institute” could also streamline the administration and coordination of job skills training. Commanders of both organizations would presumably still be

⁴³ Air Education and Training Command A3T briefing to Joint Accessions Research & Best Practices Symposium, *Training a New Breed of Airman*, 15 April 2008, contains a full description. Although 19AF conducts flying training, U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine (USAFSAM) conducts some medical skills training, and Air University (AU) conducts some professional skills training, 2AF controls the enlisted skills classification process and directly conducts the majority of enlisted skills training.

Numbered Air Force level and report directly to the AETC commander just as AFRS and 2AF commanders currently do. In this case there is still a potential coordination seam between the two entities and an integrating function might be needed to enhance coordination and administer the classification process to ensure Air Force manpower needs are met for each career field.

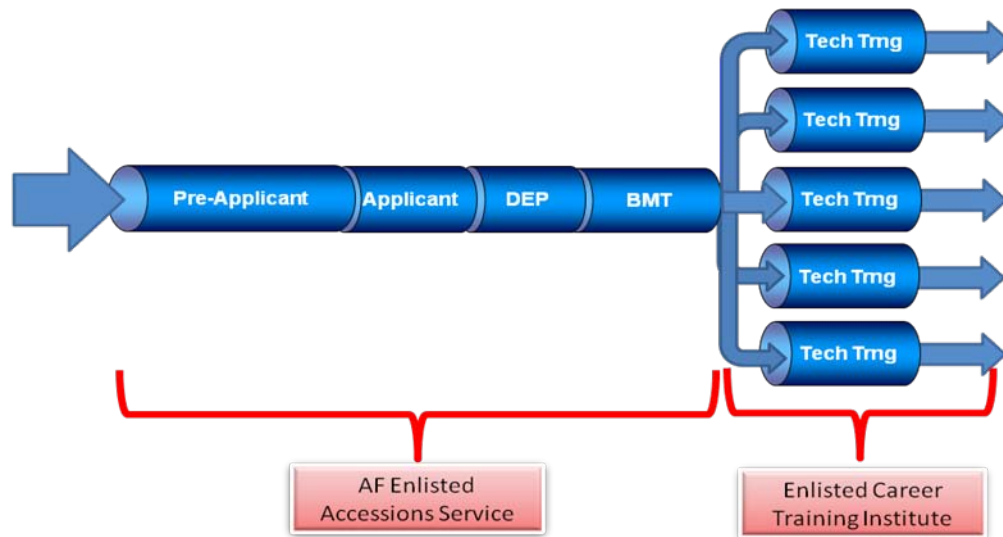


Figure 10: Notional US Air Force Accessions Model 1.

Conversely, if one views the enlisted accession process ending with graduation from tech training, then putting all three elements of the pipeline directly under one commander in an “AF Accessions Agency” might improve effectiveness. This would give a single commander authority and accountability over the entire process as Model 2 shows in Figure 11. All integrating and controlling functions could be performed by the agency staff to ensure seamless coordination and sharing of best practices.

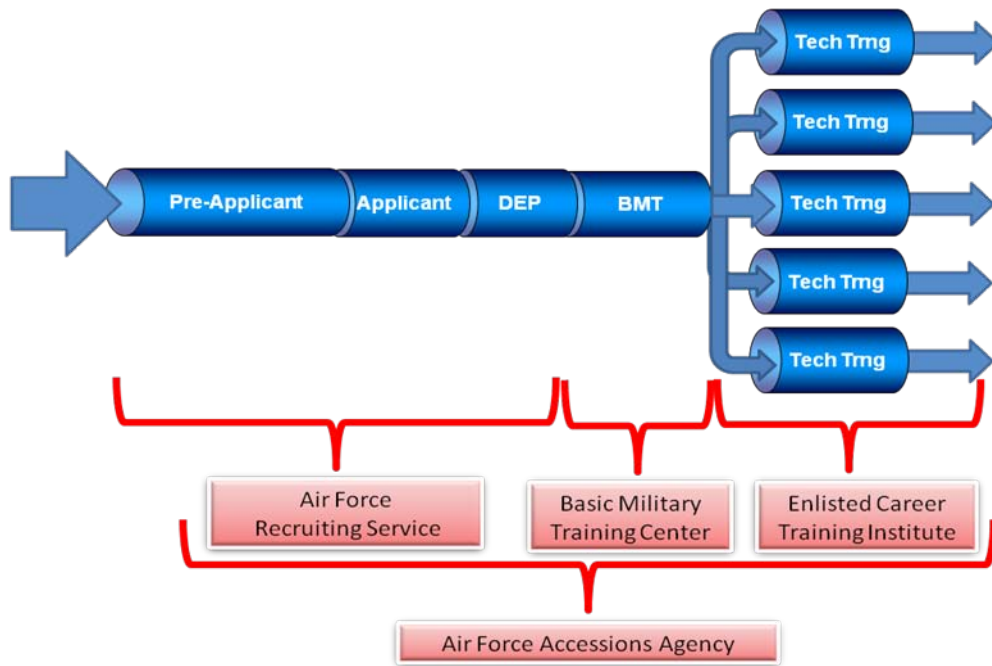


Figure 11: Notional US Air Force Accessions Model 2.

After putting the current command construct “on trial” AETC leadership might decide it is already optimized for accessions command and control. In that case, since closer coordination between the recruiting and training elements is still necessary, some mechanism for integrating organizational efforts is needed.

Recommendations

1) Short term: Establish a robust AFRS Strategic Planning Cell

AFRS should establish a permanent Strategic Planning Cell tasked with aggressively pursuing “outside-the-box” initiatives for marketing, recruiting, and accessions process coordination. The primary objective should be to increase overall accessions *at the end of the pipeline*, not merely more efficient achievement of recruiting goals. Foremost among these ideas should be a business case analysis and exploration of pilot programs for marketing and branding

the Air Force to 6-18 year olds. This should be done primarily through repeated personal engagement and exposure to Air Force role models with the objective of decreasing disqualification and attrition among the “pre-applicant” population.

Additional ideas to explore include linking specific recruiting and BMT squadrons in a teaming concept whereby recruiting/BMT teams work together and compete with other teams for rewards in accession success. Furthermore, precise metrics should be developed, in coordination with BMT and tech training leadership, to clearly measure the quality of graduating Airmen. Quality goals should be tracked and directly linked to AFRS as a part of recruiting goal attainment. These are just some examples—the Cell should be charged with generating, developing, and implementing such ideas.

2) Medium term: Establish an Accessions Integration Center

AETC’s recent initiative to develop a Continuum of Training Execution Council (COTEC) is a step in the right direction toward closing coordination gaps between accession organizations.⁴⁴ However, AETC should take the proposed COTEC a step further and make it a standing organization with specific tasking to integrate, monitor, and control the enlisted accessions process. AETC should establish an Accessions Integration Center, independent of both AFRS and 2AF, commanded at the O-6 (or equivalent) level, and reporting directly to the AETC Director of Operations. The integration center should be staffed with members experienced in recruiting, BMT, and tech training functions whose charter is to develop better coordination and integration between the three entities to increase efficiency and effectiveness throughout the accessions process.

⁴⁴ Air Education and Training Command, *Continuum of Training Execution Council (COTEC) Structure Charter (DRAFT)*, 23 November 2009, 1.

Foremost among procedures to explore should be replicating the Marine Corps model of linking recruiting goal credit to training success. The center should find ways to establish better recruit screening and preparation methods to increase the likelihood of BMT and tech training completion. They should also work to establish a linkage for MTI and MTL ownership of accessions success so trainers have incentive to ensure recruiter credit. To counterbalance incentives and methods for decreasing training attrition, accurate “policing” metrics should be developed to ensure end product quality remains high and guard against substandard trainees being graduated to reduce attrition. Accurate and objective quality measurement must be inextricably linked to incentivizing increased training production.

The Accessions Integration Center should be the focal point for all planning, programming, and monitoring functions with regard to skills classification, reclassification, and the meeting of Air Force enlisted manpower needs. This would obviate the need for the current 2AF Det 1 function at Lackland AFB and some of the analysis functions of 2AF TTOC, both of which could be a source for expertise and billets to establish the integration center.

3) Long term: Reorganize AFRS, BMT, and 2AF into Air Force Accessions Agency

AETC should adopt notional model 2 shown in Figure 11 to establish one commander as the sole authority over the entire accessions process. Organizing to incorporate the *keiretsu* concept is vital in the “supply and distribution chain” of recruits and Airmen through recruiting, BMT, and tech training. Any reorganization leaving separate entities in the accessions process without the direct focus and supervision of a single commander will continue to suffer from a lack of integrated effort.

The responsible commander must have a span of control broad enough to affect all aspects of the accessions process, yet narrow enough to focus daily activities and direction on meeting Air Force enlisted manpower needs. Direct authority from and accountability to the AETC Commander is also essential. Establishing an organization like Air Force Accessions Agency, and further aligning all tech training responsibilities within an Enlisted Career Training Institute, would provide the proper level of control to smoothly integrate all recruiting and training functions. The next logical step would be to investigate pros and cons of including officer accessions in Air Force Accessions Agency.

Conclusion

The overarching objective of the recommendations above is to achieve a synergistic approach to Air Force enlisted accessions as shown in Figure 12. The Air Force should view the entire pipeline holistically with all improvement initiatives geared toward success at the end of the process rather than toward achieving separate measures of success in each element. Furthermore, the accession process should seamlessly flow into more advanced learning venues for Airmen who will spend their entire career developing professionally, academically, and personally through continuous training and education opportunities.

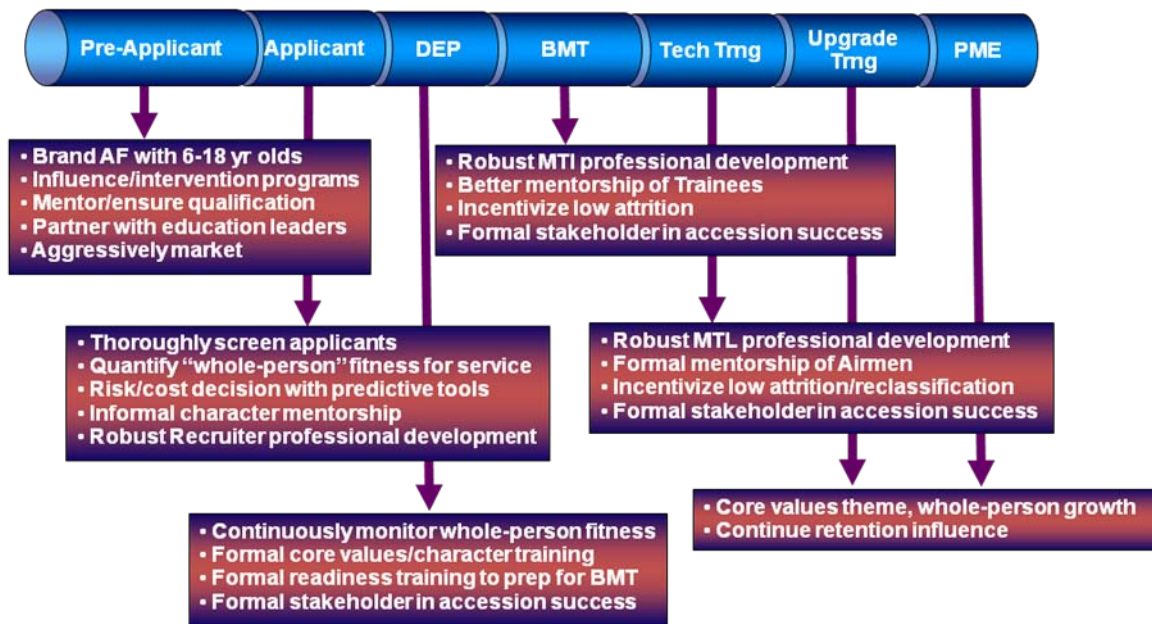


Figure 12: Integration Along the Continuum of Airman Development.

Though current Air Force recruiting and training practices have served the Service well, there is no guarantee of future success. The recruiting and training communities of the Air Force must be adaptive, learning organizations that embrace change, as the aforementioned AETC white paper advocates.⁴⁵ They must look for bold thinkers, encourage visionary and anticipatory perspectives, nurture fresh ideas, and establish structures to capture, refine, and implement those ideas. By doing so the Air Force will be fully prepared to meet the manpower challenges of the 21st century and continue its indispensable role in the defense of the Nation.

⁴⁵ AETC, *On Learning: The Future of Air Force Education and Training*, 3.

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